

Students, teachers rally for adult education in San Mateo

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About 200 people rallied in support of adult education Tuesday morning outside the San Mateo Adult School, arguing it's a vital service that should be spared from state budget cuts.

Rep. Jackie Speier joined students, teachers and union members at the East Poplar Avenue headquarters in defending the program, which enables adults to earn high school degrees and helps immigrants learn English, among other services.

"Adult education has been on the chopping block for decades in California," said Speier, D-Hillsborough, whose mother taught at the San Mateo Adult School for about 40 years. "Some people someone think it's dispensable. It's not."

Funding for adult education in California took a hit in 2009 when the state gave school districts the authority to use that money for other purposes. The budget for the San Mateo Adult School was chopped by 20 percent, yet it is in a better position than many similar programs statewide, said Tim Doyle, assistant director at the school.

Now adult educators are worried that adult education could lose its funding through what's known as the weighted student formula, a school funding mechanism that was bandied about this spring during budget talks in Sacramento. The formula calls for distributing funding to schools based on student need and not enrollment.

Speakers at Tuesday's event presented adult education as a vehicle for social mobility and economic security. It helps people enter the workforce and support their families, they said. And parents with degrees or strong language skills are able to raise better-educated kids.

Alex Arena, 18, is working on getting her diploma from the adult school after leaving Hillsdale High, where an attempted bomb attack in 2009 left her with post-traumatic stress. She's following in the footsteps of her mother, Lizzi, whose self-esteem has improved since she attained a GED from the adult school in 2010.

"Now I have faith that I can do whatever I put my mind to, and it's a wonderful feeling," Lizzi Arena said.

Other students discussed how learning English at the school helped them on the path to citizenship or higher education.